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ABSTRACT

The extent to which various factors were stress producing, the effects of stress, and coping methods used by 274 regular and special educators and administrators were examined. Six completed questionnaires on descriptive variables (such as age, sex, type of assignment and level of academic preparation) and indicated stress of 52 factors. They also reported frequency of stress effects and use of stress reduction techniques. Results revealed differences in levels of stress reported by teachers of learning disabled (LD) and mentally handicapped students (e.g., scheduling problems were significantly more stress producing for teachers of LD students); by special education and regular education teachers (e.g., lack of breaks and preparation time was significantly more stress producing for special education teachers); and by teachers in self-contained and resource room programs (e.g., discipline and behavior problems and feeling of personal isolation were significantly more stress producing for teachers in self-contained classrooms). Paperwork, procedural red tape, discipline and behavior problems and disinterested parents were high stress producers for all groups. Results further indicated that 79% of the special educators experienced at least one period of high anxiety per month, 66% reported periods of depression one or more times per month and 25% reported loss of appetite at least once a month. Frequently cited coping strategies included talking with one's spouse or colleagues, daily exercise, time off from work, and prayer. (CL)

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Stress Producing Factors and Their Effects on
Learning Disabilities Specialists, Regular Educators, and Other
Special Educators

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Stress Producing Factors and Their Effects on
Learning Disabilities Specialists, Regular Educators and Other
Special Educators

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The extent to which various factors are stress producing, the effects of this stress and methods 274 Arizona regular and special education teachers and administrators use to cope with stress were examined in 1981. Each respondent completed a questionnaire that requested data related to descriptive variables such as age, sex, type of assignment and level of academic preparation. The respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed (strongly agree, agree, no opinion, disagree or strongly disagree) that each of 52 factors was stress-producing for them during the previous year. They indicated how frequently (daily, every 2 to 7 days, 8 to 14 days, 15 to 30 days or never) they experienced each of several common effects of stress and how often they used different stress reduction techniques.

The portion of the total population described in this summary include 31 learning disabilities specialists, 27 teachers of the mentally retarded, 30 teachers of the emotionally handicapped and 30 regular classroom teachers. The mean for each item was used to rank the items for each of the groups. A one-way ANOVA was used to determine the significance of differences in means for the groups being compared for each of the stress factors studied.

Stress Producing Factors

The levels of stress reported by teachers of the learning disabled were compared with those reported by teachers of the mentally handicapped.

Significant differences were found at the .05 level on two factors.

"Scheduling problems" were significantly more stress producing for teachers of the learning disabled than for teachers of the mentally handicapped. The level of stress produced by "IEP conferences" among teachers of the mentally handicapped was significantly higher than was reported by learning disabilities specialists.

"Procedural red tape" was found to be significantly (.05) more stress producing for teachers of the learning disabled than for teachers of the emotionally handicapped. Teachers of the emotionally handicapped reported stress levels that were significantly higher (.05) than was reported by teachers of the learning disabled in three areas -- "discipline and behavior problems," dealing with "hostile-aggressive students," and with "hostile-aggressive parents."

Factors which were significantly more stress producing for special education teachers than for regular classroom teacher included:

IEP conferences	(.05)
Lack of breaks and preparation time	(.05)
Lack of time to communicate with colleagues	(.05)

"Paperwork" and "discipline and behavior problems" were found to be the most stress producing and second most stress producing factors for both groups.

Factors which were significantly more stress producing for teachers in self-contained special classrooms than for resource room teachers included.

Discipline and behavior problems	(.05)
Playground and lunch duty	(.05)
Feeling of personal isolation	(.05)
Fear that federal funding will be lost	(.05)

Resource teachers had a mean that approached the .05 level of significance

over self-contained classroom teachers for stress due to "procedural red tape."

Factors such as "preparation for class," "delivery of instruction," "interpersonal problems with other teachers and administrators," and "overcrowded classrooms," were not viewed by any of the groups to be stressful enough to be ranked among the 15 most stressful of the 52 factors studied. "Paperwork," "procedural red tape," "discipline and behavior problems," and "disinterested parents" were found to be high stress producers for all the groups studied.

Effects of Stress

Evaluation of self-reported effects of stress indicated that 79% of the special educators studied experience at least one period of high anxiety per month. Weekly periods of high anxiety were reported by 20.8% of the special educators. An additional 7.9% reported their professional responsibilities were daily sources of anxiety.

Two-thirds of the special educators reported they experienced periods of depression one or more times per month. One or more periods of depression were reported a week by 13 percent of those studied while 3.6% indicated they feel depressed during at least part of each day.

One-third of the special educators report they worry about the next day or previous day at least once a week. Difficulty in sleeping was experienced at least once a week by 30% of the special educators. Nearly half of the special educators had experienced at least a 10 percent weight loss or gain during the previous 12 months.

One-fourth of those studied report they experience a loss of appetite at least once a month. Weekly stomach upsets were reported by 17.2% of those

Methods of Coping with Stress

Talking with one's spouse or a colleague on a daily basis was used as a coping strategy by over half of those studied. Other frequently listed coping strategies included "taking time off from work," "exercising," and "prayer."

Table I
Ranks of Stress Factors by Type of Teaching Assignment

Spec. Ed.		Reg. Ed.		Sig. dif.	Stress factor
Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean		
1	4.19	1	3.86	N.S.	Paperwork
2	4.09	2	3.86	N.S.	Discipline/behavior problems
3	3.96	4	3.63	N.S.	Procedural red tape
4	3.89	3	3.70	N.S.	Disinterested parents
5	3.68	9	3.37	N.S.	Fatigue
6	3.66	29	2.92	.05	IEP conferences
7	3.59	8	3.42	N.S.	Time required for further academic preparation
8	3.46	25	3.06	N.S.	Lack of rewards for work done
9	3.40	18	3.13	.05	Lack of breaks and preparation time
10	3.39	33	2.86	.05	Lack of time to communicate with colleagues
11	3.38	20	3.10	N.S.	Scheduling problems
12	3.35	16	3.16	N.S.	Lack of time for professional reading
13	3.34	17	3.13	N.S.	Hostile, aggressive students
14	3.33	6	3.44	N.S.	Playground and lunch duty
15	3.31	27	2.96	N.S.	Pressures from district hierarchy

5.0 = strongly agree

4.0 = agree

3.0 = no opinion

2.0 = disagree

1.0 = strongly disagree

Special Education: N = 152

Regular Education: N = 31

Table II
Ranks of Stress Factors by Type of Special Classroom

Self Contained		Resource Room		Sig. dif.	Stress Factors
Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean		
1	4.34	3	3.92	.05	Discipline/behavior problems
2	4.09	1	4.16	N.S.	Paperwork
3	3.83	4	3.83	N.S.	Disinterested parents
4	3.79	2	4.05	.1	Procedural red tape
5	3.7	8	3.36	N.S.	Fatigue
6	3.51	25	3.01	.05	Playground and lunch duty
7	3.48	18	3.10	.08	Lack of breaks and preparation time
8	3.47	19	3.08	.05	Hostile/aggressive students
9	3.46	5	3.78	.09	IEP conferences
10	3.45	7	3.64	N.S.	Time required for further academic preparation
11	3.4	9	3.48	N.S.	Lack of rewards for work done
12	3.37	29	2.96	.05	Feeling of professional and personal isolation
13	3.35	31	2.94	.05	Loss of Federal funds
14	3.33	12	3.32	N.S.	Lack of time to communicate with colleagues
15	3.31	10	3.41	N.S.	Lack of time for professional reading

Self Contained: N = 75

Resource Room : N = 56

Table III

Ranks of Stress Factors by Category (LD/MH)

Learning Disabled		Mentally Handicapped		Sig. dif.	Stress Factors
Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean		
1	4.1	2	4.29	N.S.	Procedural red tape
2	4.0	1	4.5	N.S.	Paperwork
3	3.9	4	4.07	N.S.	Discipline/behavior problems
4	3.82	6	3.8	N.S.	Fatigue
5	3.72	5	3.81	N.S.	Disinterested parents
6	3.65	23	3.14	.05	Scheduling problems
7	3.65	12	3.4	N.S.	Lack of breaks and preparation time
8	3.53	11	3.42	N.S.	Time required for further academic preparation
9	3.46	3	4.22	.05	IEP conferences
10	3.44	7	3.59	N.S.	Pressures from district hierarchy
11	3.4	18	3.28	N.S.	Lack of time for professional reading
12	3.39	13	3.4	N.S.	Lack of time to communicate with colleagues
13	3.37	16	3.29	N.S.	Preparation for classes
14	3.2	17	3.28	N.S.	Lack of rewards for work done
15	3.2	10	3.44	N.S.	Playground and lunch duty

Learning disabled = 31

Mentally handicapped = 27

Table IV
Ranks of Stress Factors by Category (EH/LD)

Emotionally Handicapped		Learning Disabled		Sig. dif.	Stress Factors
Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean		
1	4.50	3	3.9	.05	Discipline/behavior problems
2	4.06	2	4.0	N.S.	Paperwork
3	3.96	32	2.82	.05	Hostile/aggressive students
4	3.93	5	3.72	N.S.	Disinterested parents
5	3.56	4	3.82	N.S.	Fatigue
6	3.53	1	4.1	.05	Procedural red tape
7	3.50	38	2.68	.05	Hostile/aggressive parents
8	3.44	33	2.62	N.S.	Feeling of personal and professional isolation
9	3.41	9	3.46	N.S.	IEP
10	3.40	14	3.2	N.S.	Lack of reward for work done
11	3.40	7	3.65	N.S.	Lack of breaks and prep time
12	3.36	11	3.4	N.S.	Lack of time for professional reading
13	3.36	8	3.53	N.S.	Time required for further academic preparations
14	3.34	36	2.72	N.S.	Lack of respect from students
15	3.33	19	3.10	N.S.	Lack of materials and equipment

Emotionally handicapped = 30

Learning disabled = 31

Table V
Ranks of Stress Factors by Category (EH/MH)

Emotionally Handicapped		Mentally Handicapped		Sig. dif.	Stress Factors
Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean		
1	4.50	4	4.07	N.S.	Discipline/behavior problems
2	4.06	1	4.5	N.S.	Paperwork
3	3.96	19	3.26	.05	Hostile/aggressive students
4	3.93	5	3.81	N.S.	Disinterested parents
5	3.56	6	3.8	N.S.	Fatigue
6	3.53	2	4.29	.05	Procedural red tape
7	3.50	28	2.96	N.S.	Hostile/aggressive parents
8	3.44	42	2.69	.05	Feeling of professional and personal isolation
9	3.41	3	4.22	.05	IEP conference
10	3.40	14	3.28	N.S.	Lack of reward for work done
11	3.40	12	3.4	N.S.	Lack of breaks and prep time
12	3.36	11	3.28	N.S.	Lack of time for professional reading
13	3.36	11	3.42	N.S.	Time required for further academic preparation
14	3.34	46	2.57	.05	Lack of respect from students
15	3.33	29	2.97	.05	Lack of materials and equipment

Emotionally handicapped = 30

Mentally retarded = 27